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SEP 09 2014

FCC Mail Room



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

August 29, 2014

TODD ROKITA  
4TH DISTRICT, INDIANA

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE  
ADMINISTRATION

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND THE WORKFORCE

ROKITA.HOUSE.GOV

Hon. Tom Wheeler, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> St., SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

As each day passes without broadband in rural America, the digital divide widens between our urban and rural populations. In the 1930s, electric cooperatives brought electricity to rural America when the for-profit utilities would not. Today, that same scenario is being replayed as we deploy broadband service in rural America. Robust broadband service is no longer a luxury, but rather a necessity for full participation in our economy and society.

The Connect America Fund (CAF) Phase II represents a tremendous opportunity to fulfill the promise of ubiquitous access to high speed internet for every American. I commend the FCC's efforts to ensure that CAF funds are maximized to their best use, and recognize the complexities of this effort. I encourage the Commission to create an inclusive process where all eligible providers, including electric cooperatives, have an opportunity to compete for support by offering effective solutions to close the digital divide between rural and urban areas.

In addition, I urge the commission to work on raising the minimum broadband speed associated with CAF Phase II funding. Deploying broadband networks using outdated speeds will only serve to increase the digital divide.

Without a level playing field, open to competition, rural America may never have the chance to experience the educational opportunities, employment prospects, and advanced healthcare that broadband delivers to those lucky enough to live in low cost, high population centers.

In my district, Fulton County REMC, Hendricks Power Cooperative, Parke County REMC, South Central Indiana REMC and Tipmont REMC have submitted Expressions of Interest to the FCC regarding CAF Phase II. By making CAF funds available to electric cooperatives, they could be a valuable asset in achieving the goal of providing accessible, affordable and reliable broadband to their members.

I look forward to working with the Commission to bring broadband service to my constituents in rural America.

Sincerely,

Todd Rokita  
Member of Congress

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OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

October 1, 2014

The Honorable Todd Rokita  
U.S. House of Representatives  
236 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Rokita:

Thank you for your letter regarding implementation of Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF Phase II). I appreciate your views and will ensure your letter is included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I agree with you that robust broadband service is no longer a luxury, but rather a necessity for full participation in our economy and society. The universal service program is one of the most important tools at our disposal to ensure that consumers and businesses in rural America have the same opportunities as their urban and suburban counterparts to be active participants in the United States of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are focused on updating the universal service high-cost program to ensure that we are delivering the best possible voice and broadband experiences to rural America. Thus, I also agree with you that it is important that we allow all interested parties an opportunity to compete to bring robust broadband to rural areas through the receipt of support from the Connect America Fund. The Commission's goal is to bring broadband to all Americans, and I believe it is critical that we have a universal program that supports any and all providers who are willing to step up and deliver service, consistent with the Commission's performance standards.

In April, the Commission voted to move forward with Phase II of the Connect America Fund in areas served by the larger telephone companies (known as price-cap carriers). Among other things, the *Connect America Fund Phase II Report and Order* sets a term of 10 years for support to be awarded through a competitive bidding process in areas where the incumbent provider is unwilling to serve based on model-based support amounts to be offered by the Commission. The competitive bidding process will be open to any entity interested in serving eligible areas, including electric cooperatives. In addition, in an associated *Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM)*, the Commission sought comment on a number of issues, including revising the current broadband performance obligations to require minimum speeds from 4 Mbps downstream to 10 Mbps downstream. We have received a robust record on these questions.

As you also note, the Commission also took an important step forward in January 2014 when, in our unanimously adopted *Technology Transitions Order*, we authorized experiments to advance the deployment of voice and broadband-capable networks in rural areas with support from the CAF. In order to inform our policies on building next-generation networks in rural America, the Commission invited parties to submit expressions of interest to determine the level



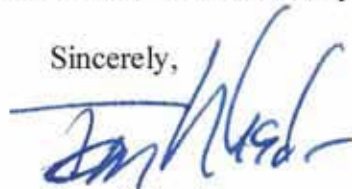
of interest in constructing high-bandwidth networks in rural, high-cost areas, including Tribal lands. Our initial announcement received an enthusiastic response in the form of over 1,000 expressions of interest from a wide range of entities, including rural electric cooperatives like those you reference, which propose offering service over diverse technologies.

The *Rural Broadband Experiments Order* adopted by the Commission at our July 2014 Open Meeting builds on what we authorized this past January by establishing a budget of \$100 million for funding rural broadband experiments in price cap areas. The *Order* sets an objective, clear-cut methodology for selecting winning applications and outlines the conditions that participating entities must meet in order to receive support, including specific eligibility, build-out, and accountability requirements. Now that we have clearly established the criteria for the experiments, interested entities must submit a formal application to the Commission. Applicants will compete nationwide for the funds, which will be awarded to projects that are most cost-effective. We hope to have the process completed by the end of 2014 because these experiments will allow us to explore how to structure the CAF Phase II competitive bidding process in price-cap areas, anticipated to occur in 2015, and gather valuable information about deploying next-generation networks in high-cost areas.

Importantly, this effort will result in a competition-based mechanism to award universal support to bring broadband to rural America. Competition holds the promise of better services for rural America at lower costs. Better service at lower cost is the result of broadband competition in other areas of the country, and it is time to use that same dynamic for the benefit of rural America.

I look forward to working with you as we continue to implement Phase II of the Connect America Fund to ensure that all Americans have access to robust voice and broadband services. I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Tom Wheeler